

Virtual reality is in Vegas

□ Computer-generated reality is among the latest technological advances at Networld + Interop.

By John G. Edwards
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A New Hampshire company has chosen the ultimate high-tech medium to sell its product at the Networld + Interop computer networking show in Las Vegas this week.

Cabletron Systems Inc. of Rochester, N.H., is using a "26-seat virtual reality theater" at Las Vegas Convention Center to demonstrate how a computer networking product works.

Virtual reality events are becoming a new way to advertise and promote products. Still another medium, computer radio broadcasts, were demonstrated nearby at Las Vegas Hilton Hotel as part of the convention.

Internet Multicasting Service, "the first radio station in cyberspace," carried interviews with Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., from Washington.

"I'm extremely concerned about the possibility that we develop into a society of information haves and have-nots," Markey said.

John Gage, science office director of Sun Microsystems Laboratories Inc., said state utility regulators should force telephone companies to provide high-speed data transmission lines at low cost or no cost to schools. Students



Gary Thompson/Review-Journal

John Gage, center standing, an executive with Sun Microsystems Laboratories Inc., explains Internet Multicasting Service, a nonprofit radio station that broadcasts

over the Internet international computer network, to a television crew. The broadcasts are part of Networld + Interop convention in Las Vegas this week.

need to be able to tap into Internet, the international computer network, from public schools, he said.

At the Cabletron exhibit, visitors

spend about an hour each talking with sales agents, waiting in line and hearing a presentation before spending about four minutes in virtual reality.

They put on odd-shaped helmets that give them the eye-view of a "data packet" of information traveling

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Convention

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through an information highway.

Virtual reality serves as a potentially costly, but an effective way, to sell a product, entertain or educate, said David Polinchock, president of Cyber Event Group Inc., the Brooklyn, N.Y., company that produced the virtual reality show.

The cost of a virtual reality exhibit at a convention ranges from \$20,000 to \$500,000, Polinchock said.

"Virtual reality lets us fly you through technology," Polinchock said. "Your retention almost triples once you get to interact with the experience," Polinchock said.

At the Cabletron exhibit, participants don't get to choose their path or "create the story" they experience as they do in some virtual reality programs because Cabletron wanted to make sure a basic message was conveyed.

Cyber Event also is the tour manager for an Scotch whisky promotion that gives people a chance to play a smuggling game based on the Prohibition Era

rum-runner, Capt. Bill McCoy.

The smuggler, whose insistence on quality led to the saying "the Real McCoy," used to ship liquor between the Bahamas and Long Island. People playing the virtual reality game in night clubs and other public places follow the same route.

"Your objective is to bring as many cases ... as you can," Polinchock said.

An advertising agency and production group created the program as a way of creating a "hip" image for the Scotch, he said.

Polinchock also is touring the country to use virtual reality for the openings of movie and music outlets for a major Florida client.

Polinchock got his start as an independent producer of a virtual reality exhibit at the Consumer Electronic Show in Las Vegas three years ago. His company, which believes it is the largest virtual reality presenter in the nation, grew from \$240,000 in revenues last year to \$1.5 million this year.